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SUBJECT: MOSCOW TOLERANCE MUSEUM TO OPEN IN 2011

¶1. (U) Summary. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia announced its plans for the opening of the world's largest museum of Jewish history and culture in Moscow in ¶2011. Financed by Russian businessman Roman Abramovich and Israeli diamond broker Lev Levaev, the museum evolved from 2004 discussions between Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov and Chief Rabbi of Israel Iona Metzger. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On September 8, Interfax news agency reported that the Museum of Tolerance, the world's largest museum of Jewish history and culture, would open in Moscow in 2011 under the direction of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia (FEOR), headed by FEOR President Aleksander Boroda. According to Moscow Human Rights Bureau Executive Director Natalya Rykova, a former assistant to Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar, discussions about establishing the museum began in September 2004 when Chief Rabbi of Israel Iona Metzger visited with Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov. Rabbi Metzger appealed to Luzhkov for the creation in Moscow of a world-class museum to serve as a tourist center for Jews around the world. Luzhkov, in turn, promised Rabbi Metzger to found a museum, and received administrative support -- and reportedly personal financial support -- from then President Vladimir Putin for the project. Russian magnate Roman Abramovich and Kremlin-connected Israeli businessman Lev Levaev funded the museum. According to Rykova and Euro-Asian Jewish Congress Vice President Roman Spektor, Abramovich also financed the construction of the museum's exposition center as a gift for his fiancée, Darya Zhukova.

¶3. (U) Construction on the museum will begin in 2009 incorporating the architecturally-unique Bakhmetev garage, designed in 1927 Soviet avant-garde style to house English automobiles, located on Obratsov Street in northwestern Moscow. The museum will encompass 17,000 square meters, 4,500 meters of which is dedicated as an exposition to the history of the Jewish people. In addition, the museum will house a scientific center, a two-story educational center and exhibition complex, a library, conference halls, and galleries. German architects from Graft Labs and designers from Ralph Appelbaum Associates, famous for their work on the USA Holocaust Memorial in Washington D.C. and the William Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock, Arkansas, have been selected for the museum's design.

¶4. (U) The museum's goal will be to present the history of Jewish life in the Russian empire and the Russian Federation in order to educate visitors on Jewish life, religion, and culture. According to Rykova, FEOR's goal is threefold: demonstrate the characteristics of the Jewish national identity through the museum's collections; attract attention to the museum through its original architecture; and, discuss the Holocaust in an empirical format with testimonials from survivors. Museum organizers have already started receiving documents and historical items as charitable donations, including a silver pointing stick used for reading the Torah and a 100 year-old Hannukah menorah.

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